

WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

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Editor: Jeannine Simon

From your editor:

I was sorry to miss the tour of Jewish Harlem which must have been very interesting and ended in a restaurant. We are already planning other tours, one to the Rockland County Jewish Museum, and another to Brighton Beach: its boardwalk and its Russian restaurants. This year is an anniversary year, very soon the fiftieth anniversary of the Six-Day War, and in November the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. More on this in later newsletters.

For now, we will concentrate on Shavuot, which we will celebrate on June 3 at CUUC. I am including an excerpt by Ben Sales published in Jewish Telegraphic Agency. This article, as well as Ann Toffel's report, mentions the mikvah, the ritual bath. This reminded me of my friendship with the mikvah lady at Temple Israel in White Plains. She was a neighbor and became a good friend. A hippie before they came into being, she turned into the mikvah lady. She passed away a few years ago. I have fond memories of Phyllis.

RABBI'S CORNER

Shavuot and Storytelling

A famous Rabbi was asked how he always had the exact right story to match any occasion. He answered in the only way he knew how—with a story:

"There was a young man who graduated from a military academy and prided himself on being one of the best marksman in the world. He came into a town looking for a little competition so that he could show off his skills. Looking around he saw an arrow on the side of the building. The arrow was right in the middle of a target—a bull's-eye! Then he saw another target with arrow right in the center. He looked around and to his amazement they were targets on buildings all over town—on the sides of barns, stores and banks. And in the middle of each target was an arrow. The young man wanted to know who the man was that could do such phenomenal shooting. And so he asked. —“Oh, that's Shlemiel, the town fool,” he was told.

—“How can that be? He always hits the bull's-eyes,” said the young man.

—“Oh, he doesn't hit the bull's-eyes,” he was told. “He shoots the arrows first and then draws the targets around them.”

"And so," said the rabbi, "I do not always have the right story for every occasion, but I try to fit the occasion to the stories I already know."

- adapted from "The Bull's Eye" by Penninah Schram

Celebrate Shavuot—without (necessarily) studying Torah

Ben Sales

Shavuot is the “Rodney Dangerfield of Jewish holidays,” says Rabbi Shira Stutman of Washington, D.C.’s Sixth and I synagogue.

Meaning: It gets no respect.

Considered by Jewish tradition to be on par with the fall and spring festivals of Sukkot and Passover, Shavuot is sometimes ignored because it is six days shorter—the holiday celebrating the biblical giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai is one day in Israel and two outside of it.

Shavuot, which this year starts on the evening of May 30, also lacks iconic, family-centric rituals. One of its only unique traditions is to stay up until dawn studying Torah on the first night. Because the holiday demands knowledge and stamina (or lots of coffee), it’s no surprise that pulling an all-nighter poring over the Talmud hasn’t become as widespread as, say, lighting a menorah.

But in recent years, synagogues and Jewish organizations across the country are trying to make the practice more accessible.

The New York City Mega-Shavuots

What do you do if you have a lot of Jews living in the same neighborhood? In the Big Apple, two groups are doing big Shavuot all-nighters, with a range of Torah classes and plenty more.

The JCC Manhattan, which has had an all-night program each Shavuot since 2004, has a schedule so full it’s dizzying. Offerings include text study, dance workshops, yoga, film screening and meditation. On the roof, an installation by artist Tobi Kahn will reinterpret the mikvah, or Jewish ritual bath. And owing to the tradition of eating dairy on Shavuot, cheesecake and cookies will be offered.

“A deep value of our community is understanding and celebrating its diversity,” said Rabbi Joy Levitt, JCC Manhattan’s executive director. “We wanted to make sure that we were able to attract the widest number of people with a very expansive view of Torah.”

A similar program will happen across the East River, where Shavuot Across Brooklyn will bring together participants from the borough’s

range of synagogues and independent prayer groups. Similar to the JCC array, sessions span from a “Free Minds Prison Poetry Workshop” to one on Hebrew slang.

The top-billed event is a book reading and discussion by the author couple Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman focused on their thoughts on a recent trip to Israel and the West Bank. The event is sponsored by Breaking the Silence, an Israeli veterans’ group that opposes Israel’s occupation.

“It’s a reflection of the reality of people’s interests,” said Matt Green, a rabbinic intern at Congregation Beth Elohim, the Reform synagogue in the Park Slope neighborhood that is hosting the program. “Many of the participants are familiar and conversant in Jewish texts, but a much greater number of people are not.”

This article from JTA has been sent by Diane Steinfink

A Report by Ann Toffel

On May 10th I attended a meeting sponsored by the Westchester Jewish Council at Temple Israel Center of White Plains on behalf of the WCHJ. There were 30 people representing about 20 synagogues/Jewish organizations.

We started with going around the table to introduce ourselves and have a chance to share a bit about the group we were representing. I was glad to briefly “promote” Humanistic Judaism and make myself available for questions at the conclusion of the meeting.

The opening discussion was on the need for *maintaining a safe place* in an increasingly negative society. One of the handouts was from ADL entitled “18 Best Practices for Jewish Institutional Security”. The list included being mindful of suspicious activity and how to report it, creating and implementing a plan to deal with bomb threats, and the need to establish policies regarding online communications and whether to post event calendars and addresses.

There was a conversation regarding *religion and politics*. It was pointed out that synagogues have talked politics in the past and that churches were behind the Civil Rights movement. Some of the fears

voiced were that some of the constituents might leave in protest if they disagreed with the point of view expressed and since membership is the financial “pipeline,” this would affect the viability of the institution. It was suggested that the Rabbi could speak for himself and not for the organization. The Rabbi could post, but again as a private citizen on Social Media. It was recommended that organizations have a Social Justice Committee where people could express their points of view, and be listened to respectfully without the risk of being alienated.

There is also a financial incentive for politicians to donate to a religious group where they can claim a tax deduction as opposed to money given to a political party which is not deductible.

The group was asked for ideas to *attract and keep new members*.

One suggestion was for the rabbi to have coffee with three or four families in order to get to know them personally. Also current member families should be asked to bring in relatives and neighbors. Another was offering incentives to join and then getting people involved right away.

The Regional Manager of SYNERGY, part of UJA, reported that they are having a meeting regarding *voluntary dues* as a new model for membership and another to discuss the inclusion of people with all abilities. They are also doing an Executive Director Survey to help understand the role as part of the synagogue’s professional team. The meeting concluded with synagogues reporting on new initiatives this year. The most unusual were: Kol Ami in White Plains worked with Con Edison, Bright Energy Services and others in addressing high utility costs and was able to secure over \$100,000 in rebates for energy upgrades. Temple Israel Center in White Plains is the only synagogue in Westchester that has a Conservative Mikvah. Another reported on a weekly publication “Talmud Israeli” in English and Hebrew with columns about the Torah portion of the week, and articles about Israel and Jewish history. The website is www.talmudisraeli.co.il where there are also “YouTube” clips.

(Ed. Note. Re the website: It all looked like Hebrew to me)



THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM
**INVITES YOU TO OUR ANNUAL MINI-ART SHOW AND
CELEBRATION OF SHAVUOT**

SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 2:30 PM, COMMUNITY UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

SPECIAL FEATURE- DIANE WILL TELL US ABOUT THE JEWISH
HUMANIST AWARD OF THE YEAR TO ROSALIND FRANKLIN,
NOTED PIONEER MOLECULAR BIOLOGIST

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS ARE PROVIDED. NO CHARGE BUT
DONATIONS ARE WELCOME.

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or search our website, wchj.org

History Buffs will meet on Saturday, June 10 at Jack and Judy Billig,
1 Hilltop Lane, White Plains at 10:00 o'clock. The book to be
discussed is *The Dovekeepers* by Alice Hoffman.

Dates 2016/2017, 5777/5778

Here is a list of *tentative* dates for the coming year, both for celebrating the Holy Days and for programs:

Shavuot, members art exhibit	June 3, 2:30 pm, CUUC
Annual Members' Luncheon	June 10, 1 pm, Roma restaurant
Havdalah under the stars	CUUC, tbc

Directions

COMMUNITY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION
(468 Rosedale Ave. White Plains, NY 10605)

- Take the Hutchinson River Parkway to Exit 25 for North St.
- Follow the sign to White Plains (LEFT if you are traveling NORTH. RIGHT if you are traveling SOUTH) onto North St.
- At first light, turn LEFT onto Rosedale Ave.
- Go one block and look for WHITE sign for Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Turn right onto Sycamore Lane to parking lot.

or

Take Hutch to Mamaroneck Avenue toward White Plains. Take right on Rosedale Ave. About one mile to white sign. Turn left on Sycamore Lane to parking lot